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SUBJECT: IRAQI MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION DISCUSSES SUNNI BOYCOTT

Classified By: Political Counselor Matt Tueller for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: In a meeting with PolOffs on September 8, Abd Dhiyab al-Ajili said that he has technically resigned from his duties as Minister of Higher Education as part of the August 1 Tawafuq bloc withdrawal, but still advises his staff on ministry issues. He believes Tawafuq's withdrawal was hasty, but ultimately necessary given the lack of progress on key issues of concern to Sunnis. He does not see a strong commitment in the government to national reconciliation and believes the Maliki government will be forced out. He criticized the influence of political-religious clerics in the PM's Office, blaming them for most of Iraq's problems and bemoaning their interference in his ministry. He was mildly optimistic about the status of higher education in Iraq, even though he spends half his time dealing with university security issues. End summary.

STILL WORKING - UNOFFICIALLY

¶12. (C) In a September 8 meeting with PolOffs, former Minister of Higher Education Abd Dhiyab al-Ajili said that he has "technically" resigned and does not physically go to the Ministry since the Tawafuq ministers quit the government on August 1. He said he continues to be involved in the ministry's planning efforts and provides advice to his staff from home. He also continues to visit Iraq's twenty-six public universities. However, he acknowledged that he no longer has authority to sign any contracts, and said the PM (as Acting Minister of Higher Education) has this authority now. He said he was unable to withdraw his letter of resignation given the political ramifications, but wanted to return to his position.

¶13. (C) When asked whether he supported Tawafuq's withdrawal from the government, Ajili said that he was present at the meeting in which the decision had been made, and had cautioned VP Hashimi and other Tawafuq members to go slow. Hashimi had also been hesitant, but the majority of the Tawafuq/IIP members opted for withdrawal to protest the lack of power-sharing among the major parties, and the GOI's failure to provide security. In retrospect, he believes Tawafuq's decision was necessary, and he blames the Ministry of Interior for the bulk of the problem, saying: "Iraq needs ministers that think of Iraq and not their own parties."

¶14. (C) Ajili said that he expects the Maliki Government will be forced out, in large part because it lacks any real desire for reconciliation. He blamed many of the problems in the GOI on political-religious clerics who he claimed were imposing their views on PM Maliki. He also criticized Maliki's staff for intervening in ministerial personnel matters. He said it was impossible for a minister to fire or change staff at the Director General (DG) or Deputy level, and sometimes even at lower levels.

IMPACT OF DE-BA'ATHIFICATION AT UNIVERSITIES

¶ 15. (C) When asked about the impact of de-Ba'athification on Iraq's universities, Ajili said some professors lost their jobs when CPA Order #1 took effect in 2003. Some thirty professors have asked for his help in reclaiming pensions and other forfeited benefits. In summary, however, he said that the impact of de-Ba'athification on the universities was "not a major issue."

BIO NOTE

¶ 16. (C) Although he remains beholden to Tawafiq for nominating him to his former ministerial post, Ajili considers himself to be an independent Sunni. A former university professor, he speaks excellent English. He is optimistic about the future of Iraq and seems to have a moderate outlook on Iraqi politics. He has worked in Bahrain and claimed to have a working relationship with UNESCO. He said he has published eight books related to higher education.

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